

Would Teach For America, one of the greatest mass movements in America's education history, work as brilliantly in India?

Well, a group of young Indian education luminaries thought so and explored the feasibility of adapting this movement to the Indian context. They reached out to Wendy Kopp, co-founder and chief executive officer of Teach For America for support and invited her to visit India.

"What I saw on that trip showed me that the time for Teach For India is now—the leaders among college graduates will jump at the opportunity, and there will be allies for this idea within education, government, and the private and philanthropic sectors," says Kopp.

Teach For India will roll out its first batch of 100 highly talented graduates and young Indian professionals in June 2009. "Teach For India has a compelling potential to have an impact in the lives of some of India's most disadvantaged children while also marshalling the talent and energy of India's future leaders against its enormous disparities," says Kopp, who is an executive board director at Teach For India.

Like thousands of their counterparts in America, Teach For India graduates will postpone their careers and head for some of India's poorest and most challenging schools, hoping to give the best possible education to the least advantaged children. Full-time, for two years.

Teach For India would utilize the best experiences of Teach For America, says Shaheen Mistri, who is leading the initiative in India. "Its mission is to create a movement of leaders who will work to end educational inequity in India. To this end...TFI will need to find solutions that are India-specific, adapting to the local context and culture," Mistri says.

While the graduates are not required to have a teaching degree to participate in the program, they become salaried teachers for the two-year period. But before placement in schools, they would be

required to participate in intensive training to help prepare them for the classroom.

Teach For India teachers would receive the same salary as a regular teacher at that position and experience plus a stipend for housing and transportation. But while Teach For America serves as a placement organization, with corps members becoming employees of the local school district, Teach

For India would be directly paying all or a portion of the teachers' salaries.

Teach For India is financially supported by the Texas-based Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. It has some individual donors, too, though there is a lack of corporate sponsors at the moment. Teach For India says it is actively pursuing the type of business sponsorships which provide much of the funding for the American program.

According to the United Nations, a third of all Indians are illiterate and perhaps 42 million children, aged 6 to 10, do not attend school. Mistri says she expects that the program will "champion the importance of a great teacher and make teaching inspirational."

Teach For India will also conduct outreach to parents, school administrators and other key stakeholders to garner support for the program. Initially launching in Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, Teach For India hopes to gradually place 2,000 high-potential college graduates in at least a dozen urban and rural schools by 2013.

India has a lot to learn from Teach For America, which has come to be regarded as a program that attracts only the best and brightest.

In fact, Kopp does not harbor any doubts about replicating Teach For America's success in India. "Today, Teach For America is one of the largest interventions in the public education system, reaching [about] 500,000 students with 6,000 teachers," she says. "Teach For America alumni are at the center of the education reform movement—they are leading school systems, hundreds are running high-performing schools in low-income communities as principals, and others are winning recognition as exceptional experienced teachers, pioneering new solutions as social entrepreneurs...I realize that this model could have a similar, and very possibly, greater impact in India."

<http://www.teachforindia.org/>



Teach For India

By RICHA VARMA

Top Indian graduates will postpone their careers to teach at the most challenging schools. Full-time, for two years.